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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001611

SIPDIS  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/07

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: Karimov speech spells out priorities for 2010

CLASSIFIED BY: Duane C Butcher, DCM, State, EXEC; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

[11](#). (U) President Islom Karimov invited the Diplomatic Corps and an array of local dignitaries to the annual commemoration of Uzbekistan's Constitution Day December 5th at the impressive new white marble "Palace of Forums" on Amir Timur Square. These speeches are generally a review of the last calendar year as well as a statement of the government's priority for the next. 2009 was the "Year of rural development," and 2010 will be the "Year of Harmonious Generations." This appears to indicate an emphasis on education at all levels, harkening back to 2008 as the "Year of Youth" with perhaps an additional hint of concern for "Uzbek values" under attack from the forces of "mass culture."

[12](#). (U) Karimov began the speech by describing the importance of the December 27th local and parliamentary elections, emphasizing that they must be beyond reproach, that no one should be able to improperly influence the results. He said not only that they should be held on the basis of "transparency, freedom, and fairness," but that the "suggestions and views" of outside observers must be treated "respectfully and attentively." He framed the elections as a test of the "level and maturity of civil society in our country," and asked "to what extent [is Uzbekistan] ready to stand such a complex and responsible political test and hold these electoral processes at the level of electoral system now effective in the developed democratic states."

[13](#). (U) In a summary of the results of 2009, he listed an array of statistics documenting his government's efforts to improve life in Uzbekistan's villages and countryside. He described impressive levels of investment in new housing, schools, and other infrastructure. He emphasized the construction of schools, and especially the installation of computers and broader access to the Internet. He also declared that investment in rural areas would continue at least at the same rate in the next year.

[14](#). (U) In introducing 2010 as the "Year of Harmonious Generations," Karimov said that the "core essence of life" is "bringing up our children physically and spiritually healthy, being inferior in nothing to no one, see their happiness and prosperous future." His prescription for achieving this goal is to create "the necessary conditions for the youth to acquire...deep knowledge and modern professions" and to train a "highly qualified workforce, young specialists capable of taking on responsibility for the future and further development of the country." This means improving state educational standards at secondary and higher levels, and introducing new information and pedagogical technologies. He repeated that it "is really significant to create a still broader basis of introducing the latest information and

computer technology, digital and broadband telecommunications and internet," not only at educational institutions but also "in the life of each family." After reiterating the importance of education to the future success of the country, he also warned that vigilance was necessary against the attacks of "mass culture" against the "centuries-old values of our people." (Note: Karimov and the GOU frequently emphasize education and note with some pride that investment in education is one of the single largest items in Uzbekistan's state budget since independence.)

15. (C) President Karimov appeared fit and in command of his material. He read the prepared portions of his speech clearly, but became animated several times when he put down his reading glasses and entered into several-minute-long sometimes humorous ad-libbed asides. In one he described how Uzbeks all came from villages and all had relatives in villages, that now one is proud to be from a "kishlak" which a few years ago would have been thought embarrassing. In the longest departure from his prepared text, he entered into a lengthy condemnation of the leadership of Russia, accusing them of blaming the United States for all of their problems and of neglecting the opportunity to reinvest their oil revenue into the development of their country. Where, he asked, would Uzbekistan be if it were still relying exclusively on cotton instead of concentrating on developing the manufacturing industries? Karimov's prepared remarks were met with regular polite applause, but his asides were greeted with markedly more enthusiasm, including several standing ovations. The entire

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ceremony was characterized by a studious lack of the personality cult that Karimov often criticizes in his colleagues: he spoke at a normal sized podium with an arrangement of white flowers in front of it, in front of a small Uzbek flag with a much larger Uzbek flag forming a backdrop to the entire stage. The audience stood and applauded his arrival and departure, with enthusiasm but no excessive displays of adulation; no picture of the President was to be seen anywhere in the ceremony or in the building itself.

16. (C) Comment and Action Request: While this speech was unremarkable in itself, the emphasis on expanding access to information technology and the internet is an outstanding opportunity for the USG in both the long and the short term. In the long term, increased access for the Uzbek population to the modern world of information can only further our goal of improving human rights, and developing civil society. It would also complement with renewed USG efforts to make use of new media in our public diplomacy, not to mention decreasing the population's reliance on Russia's heavily biased broadcast media. In the very short run, this emphasis on information technology suggests a terrific "low-hanging" deliverable for the imminent bilateral consultations. Post urgently recommends that the Department consider a package of assistance to Uzbekistan along these lines that could be offered at least in principle at the consultations themselves. Possible forms could be a major donation of computers to schools or school children, or some type of investment in Uzbekistan's woefully narrow internet backbone. Most here agree that the biggest problem with the internet here is not censorship, which is quite easy to avoid, but capacity. An investment in improved access by normal Uzbeks to the internet can only benefit us, as well as providing a nice sweetener for the upcoming talks, especially as it dovetails nicely with President Karimov's newly announced priority for the next year. This would be a positive (and non-controversial) way to give FM Norov something to take home and get the nascent bilateral consultations off to an auspicious start.  
BUTCHER